

PERFORMANCE

THEATRE / DANCE / LIVE ART

Review The Tempest

Tobacco Factory, Bristol (to Sat 1 May)

THEATRE 'The Tempest' must rank as Shakespeare's most ungraspable play – although it has some famous lines of heart-stopping beauty, it has no dramatic centre and a back-story that's ultimately hard to care about. That's probably why Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory have eschewed it, till now, and why many directors have chosen to obscure its lack of substance beneath a mystical soundscape, or to riff on its imagery in an impressionistic way (as Greenaway did on celluloid in 'Prospero's Books'). True to form, Andrew Hilton has stripped it back instead, exposing its characters to scrutiny. Ian Barritt's Prospero is more intemperate old physics master than tyrannical sorcerer "composed of harshness", and seems comfortably in character only when Prospero converts to goodness near the end. Chris Staines (pictured) is hard-tasked to play both Ariel and Caliban as two sides of a coin, being more suited to the elemental – his spine-tingling rendition of 'Full Fathom Five' is worth the ticket price alone. Pffion Jolly's tomboyish Miranda has the quivering innocence of a woodland faun, making her forthright carnal attraction to the emotional Ferdinand – well-drawn by Ben Askew – all the more delectable.

Chris Donnelly (who so generously gave Bristol his Bottom) and Felix Hayes delight as the drunken comic duo, Stephano (silver-tongued but slurry) and Trinculo, a giant toddler unsteady on his feet. Jonathan Nibbs is a regal and gimlet-eyed Alonso, David Plimmer is quietly good as the Boatswain, while Antonio and Sebastian are pleasingly poisonous. The delivery is a little shouty here and there, and the costumes for Ceres, Juno and the harpy are right off the scale for campness. Although 'Tempest' isn't the unbridled pleasure-fest that 'Dream' was, fine acting and generous teamwork conspire to pull off no mean feat of stagecraft, such stuff as dreams are made of... (Rina Vergano) ★★★★★

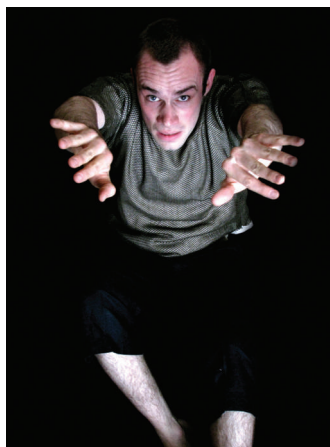


PIC: GRAHAM BURKE

Review Odyssey

The Ustinov, Bath (Thur 1-Sat 3 Apr)

THEATRE Abbreviating 12,100 lines of Homeric Greek into a one-hour, one-man show sounds like one sacrifice after another – presumably the only way for Theatre Ad Infinitum to get away with this is to cut almost everything. But director Nir Paldi and actor George Mann, who learned their highly distinctive trade at the Jacques Lecoq theatre school in Paris, manage to scorch through the story's key episodes without any sense that certain events have gone astray. Beginning, as epics do, *in media res*, Mann is at first Odysseus, zonked plaything of the sea nymph Calypso. But the gods interfere and expedite his voyage back to Ithaca, where wife Penelope is besieged by 118 conniving suitors, and it quickly transpires that Mann is carrying the entire Mediterranean in his body. He is 'Odyssey's human cast, its assorted divine meddlers, its monsters, its swine and all of the elements. Some of this pacy, lean production seems influenced by cinematic jump-cuts, montages and zooms, but it's also an approximation of the poem's oral beginnings, and Mann ends his telling with Penelope and her long-lost king in the marital bed, "revelling in stories". 'Odyssey' is Ad Infinitum's advertisement for stripped-down storytelling, and a creditable conjuring trick. (Thom Hutchinson) ★★★★★



Review White Caps

Bristol Old Vic Studio (Wed 31 Mar-Sat 3 Apr)

DANCE *Coups de théâtre* don't come much better than the opening of Champloo's 'White Caps', where a giant of a man appears out of the darkness and strides into the audience. Of course he doesn't really; it's just one of the many illusions that make this dance/cinema combination so memorable. In it Bristol B-Boy duo Wilkie Branson and Joel Daniel take their urban dance into a rural environment, the twists and tumbles of the street taking on a new perspective as they twist under and over branches and run barefoot along woodland tracks, spinning through the countryside. Some of the filmed sequences are exceptional: Bristol city centre's fountains are combined with a country landscape to create a watery staircase to heaven. By far the most impressive part finds the celluloid Wilkie plunging into the water, becoming totally submerged, invisible beneath the ripples while a smaller underwater version looks on. If the live dance seemed a little flat, hampered by its level terrain and more conventional approach, it was largely due to the brilliance of the cinematic element – magnificently realised by Rob Saunders – which overshadowed it. Over the years there have been many attempts to create dance for the screen; very, very few have been as successful as this. (Lesley Barnes) ★★★★★



PIC: KATHERINE GATT